

Communication from the IUA Council to  
Minister for Education and Skills, Mr Ruairi Quinn TD  
on the matter of:

# **Reform of Selection and Entry to University in the Context of National Educational Policy**

IRISH UNIVERSITIES IRISH UNIVERS

UNIV

ISH UNIVERSITIES IRISH UNIVERSITIES IRISH UNIVER



Dear Minister,

Following our meeting in Spring 2011, you requested the universities to develop ideas and options around how the current selection for students to higher education could be reformed to support the planned enhancements of teaching and learning in senior cycle at second-level.

In making this request, you expressed your concern that the “benefits of any broader [senior cycle] curricular reforms could be undermined by the impact of the demands and pressures of competitive entry requirements for higher education, which can heavily influence teaching approaches, learning behaviours and subject choices for the Leaving Certificate examination.”

Since that time, we have reported to and participated in the HEA/NCCA “Transitions Conference”, established Working Groups in each of our Universities, held an International Conference on the issues, and undertaken further exploration and analysis at sectoral level through the IUA.

We report now to you on the current state of our thinking and the next steps we propose to take.

Council of the Irish Universities Association

August 2012

## 1. The Problem is Systemic

We have concluded that the structure and content of the second level curriculum, methods of assessment and the transition to third level are systemically interconnected. They have an impact and influence on both learners and educators alike. Solutions to the problems articulated by you can only be derived through “joined up” concerted action, since most changes to the system have repercussions at both second and third level, and indeed, potentially in the broader social and economic environment.

## 2. Core Principles

Change has to have regard to the core principles underpinning selection and admission. For our part these are to:

- Reward merit and student effort
- Promote equity of access
- Ensure transparency and simplicity
- Maintain integrity, incorruptibility and high levels of public trust
- Ensure efficiency and cost-effectiveness
- Promote positive educational values and achievements and personal development
- Avoid distorting other elements of the educational continuum.

We want to highlight the pragmatic reality that the design of any selection and admission system involves trade-offs between these principles: there is no perfect system. However, we equally want to highlight that there are significant problems with the current system which need to be addressed. While the existing admissions system worked well following its initial introduction, and in many respects continues to work well, a pattern has emerged where the selection process for higher education is having disproportionate and undesirable effects on student learning behaviours at second level. Specifically, the interaction between a highly predictable and high stakes Leaving Certificate Examination, the manner in which grades are awarded and converted into a points score, and the proliferation of options for entry into higher education has had three adverse effects (i) a tendency to rote learning at second level (ii) strategic subject choice in the senior cycle and (iii) premature specialisation at third level. We highlight the issues with the current system by reference to its positive and negative features.

## 3. Pros and Cons of the current Leaving Certificate / Points System

### 3.1 Positive features of current system (Pros)

In its favour, the construct of the current (mainstream) selection and entry system is:

- Utterly transparent
- Highly efficient and cost effective
- The Leaving Certificate continues to be a reliable predictor of student performance in higher education.

### 3.2 Negative features (Cons)

However, optimising these positive features comes at a price, as the system:

- Does not promote positive educational values or personal development, but rather a very narrow instrumental approach to education and development which distorts approaches to teaching and learning, including subject choice, and creates a feed forward distortion into third level;
- While equitable in the transparency and incorruptibility of the assessment and selection process, it promotes significant inequity through the capacity of the more advantaged to game the system.

## 4. The system must be rebalanced in favour of positive educational values

The current benefits of the Leaving Certificate/ Points system come at a significant price. We have concluded, therefore, that the system needs to be rebalanced in favour of positive educational values, personal development and a more seamless relationship between second, further and higher education.

This can only be done by the key actors responsible for assessment, selection and admissions acting in concert.

## 5. Specific Recommendations of the IUA Council

At this juncture, we wish to highlight three specific recommendations which we wish to see progressed:

### 1. Reduce Leaving Certificate Grading Scale from 14 to 8 Points

We have concluded that there is merit in reducing the current fourteen point grading scale to an eight point scale, i.e. A1, A2, B, C, D, E, F, NG. This will allow beneficial changes to how the leaving certificate is assessed and consequent changes in university selection methods.

### 2. Further move towards common entry

Much of the “heat” in the “points race” arises from those courses where places are most limited and thus points are highest. A move to greater common entry would be challenging but would significantly alter the dynamic of competition for university places. It is desirable that institutions progress towards greater common entry, while noting that there will continue to be a particular challenge regarding competition for entry into highly selective programmes such as the health professions and other similar areas.

### 3. Incentivise Strategically Important Subjects

Currently (with the exception of bonus points for maths) all subjects are treated equally for points purposes. There is scope to change this approach to create further incentives for students to study and achieve in specific, prioritised subjects.

These recommendations and a number of other priority issues will now be taken forward.

## 6. Expert Taskforce to Report in December 2012

We are now establishing an expert Taskforce to develop final proposals on the necessary system changes and a roadmap for implementation. The taskforce will be chaired on behalf of Council by Professor Philip Nolan, President of NUI Maynooth. In addition to the relevant university representatives, we will be seeking the close involvement of senior NCCA and SEC officials in the work of the Taskforce.

The Taskforce will complete its work by the end of 2012.

## 7. Priority issues

We do not wish to be prescriptive in regard to the issues to be addressed by the taskforce. However, based on our work to date, we wish to draw attention to a number of priority issues outlined below. Where relevant, more detailed information is

provided in the accompanying notes in relation to our specific recommendations and these priority issues

### 7.1 Revised Leaving Certificate assessment methodologies

This is a priority issue which will be addressed by the Taskforce, including how the long term relationship between the universities and the State’s curriculum and assessment structures can be more strategically developed to support positive educational values and learning behaviours at second and third level. In particular, a critical review is needed of how the structure of the examination and its assessment modalities may backwash into undesirable learning behaviours at second level and impact negatively on the preparedness of students for third level.

### 7.2 Changes to University Entry Requirements<sup>1</sup>

There are various ways in which university entry could be modified to be less dependent on the points system. At present, the mainstream points system is the dominant (but far from exclusive route) to higher education entry, accounting for approximately 78% of new undergraduate entrants each year.

As can be seen by the summary table below, significant numbers of students apply to and enter Irish universities and other college through alternative, less competitive, entry routes such as the Mature student and FETAC entry routes, the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) and the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE).

	Applicants 2010	% of Total Applicants 2010	Net Accepts 2010	% of Net Total Accepts 2010
Mature	14,910	19.07%	7,132	15.63%
FETAC	11,711	14.98%	2,360	5.17%
HEAR	8,399	10.74%	1,118	2.45%
DARE	2,309	2.95%	400	0.88%

In addition, significant numbers of part-time undergraduate students are also present in Irish HEIs

Academic Year 2010 -11	Total Undergraduate FT + PT	Undergraduate Part-time	Undergraduate Part-time %
	169,539	25,431	15%

#### 7.2.A More common entry programmes

Such programmes are already a feature of the university system. Note 1 gives our analysis of the place of common entry and more specialised entry in an Irish and international context.

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that there will be a certain small amount of double counting of students across these various categories (for example, the same student may be classified under both FETAC and part-time, or may have applied using both the Mature and DARE routes). However, any such double counting would be at the margin.

### **7.2 B. Graduate entry only for certain professional courses**

These are the courses for which the competition is greatest and thus have the highest points. In the US many of these courses are graduate entry only. Issues including cost and the accreditation requirements of professional bodies need to be explored.

### **7.3. Reversion to the previous less granular method of grading the Leaving Certificate – with implications for the points system**

As stated in section five, we are recommending movement from the current 14 grade point system to an 8 point system and have undertaken research on the effects of this. (Note 2)

### **7.4. Ranking based scores for points purposes**

This involves moving away from awarding points for absolute performance in the Leaving Certificate and focusing on the relative performance in the discipline. In essence, the highest points are awarded to the cohort of students who perform best relative to their peers in the specific subject. (Note 3)

### **7.5. Supplementary Assessment**

Introduce more extensive non-leaving cert based supplementary assessment methodologies such as personal statements or HPAT type assessments (Note 4)<sup>2</sup>

### **7.5 A. Introduce a Mathematics and Irish examination for matriculation purposes at end fifth year**

While bonus points for maths have assisted in addressing the issue of students dropping back to the ordinary course from the honours course, there is potential to use additional approaches to address this phenomenon.

Consideration could be given to an examination at the end of fifth year which could be used for matriculation purposes where passes in Irish and / or maths are required. The effect of this would be to give students the confidence that they had satisfied minimum university requirements for entry and to encourage them to continue to pursue the higher level course.

### **7.6. Effects of subject combination (including for repeat purposes)**

Another area which may be worth additional consideration is the fact that some subjects in the Leaving Certificate overlap. There is anecdotal evidence that some students combine these strategically, especially when repeating the LC. Some research into the distribution of these subjects, especially in repeat LC situations, would give a clearer indication of this. Examples of potential overlap areas worth examining include Agricultural Science, Biology and Home Economics (Social & Scientific). This

will be pursued in the context of the Taskforce's work.

### **7.7. Expansion of bonus points**

Provide additional points for certain subjects – sub options here are to do this for specific entry routes or at a more general level for subjects which are deemed to be strategically important and/or are more demanding in terms of workload at second level. The planned review of the Bonus Points for LC Higher Level Mathematics pilot scheme, introduced in 2012, will inform this option.

### **7.8. Information and Transversal/ Foundational Skills**

A number of other issues relating to the transition to Higher Education have featured in the policy dialogue including the provision of better information for students on course offerings and the development of transversal skills. These matters are well progressed at university level. (Note 5)

One structural issue which arises is the timing of the release of the LC results. Currently, this allows very little flexibility for learners, guidance counsellors or providers to ensure that the final choices made by learners regarding post-secondary options are made based on the most complete information possible, including LC results. This is important in ensuring that learners progress effectively and efficiently to their most suitable option, and that this transition is made in a way which enhances the learner's chances of success.

## **8. Overall configuration of the Post-Secondary system**

A significant part of the pressure on students which is attributed to the points system arises from an excess of demand over supply for university places, as opposed to places in other parts of the post-secondary education and training landscape. This pressure would be alleviated by improving progression through the entire post-secondary system. In particular, further education is quite underdeveloped in Ireland. Demographic projections indicate that there will be strong pressure on further and higher education over the next two decades and concerted action needs to be taken now to more critically examine the structure of provision to address this. IUA is already working closely with HEA in this regard. These efforts need to be expanded at national level to holistically assess provision and progression routes across further and higher education.

<sup>2</sup> See also Appendix - "New Models of Assessment"

# Notes for Information

## Note One: Variety of Courses – Common and Specialised Entry

Some commentators have been critical of what is seen as an unwarranted increase in the number of course offerings and how this translates into growth in the number of CAO codes and the points levels associated with courses which have low intake. Increases in the numbers of course offerings are said to increase confusion on the part of students. It has also been said that narrowly defined courses promote too early specialisation on the part of students. It has also been asserted that institutions may be arbitrarily segmenting courses to create an illusion of small quotas and thus inflate points.

The increase in the number of CAO codes across higher education as a whole including IOTs and Universities is undeniable. In light of these concerns, we have examined this from national and international perspectives as follows.

### The national position

Most universities already offer common entry routes to such subject areas as engineering, science, arts and humanities, business, law, etc. In 2011, an average of 45% of first year undergraduate students entered the university sector through one of these common entry routes. It can be said that there are however significant variations between the universities in the percentage of students in this category of programme.

In many cases, these generic entry routes are also supplemented by more specialised entry routes within the same broad subject areas.

In that regard, an average of 30% of first year undergraduate students entered the university sector in 2011 through specialised entry routes where students share a substantial amount of lecture/lab time with students on a common entry programme in a cognate area. Programmes such as Business with a Modern Language, ICT with a Modern Language or Law with a Modern Language, or the various professional branches of Nursing, are typical of this category. Again, there is variation between the universities in the percentage of students on this category of programme, reflecting the profile of the university, its regional positioning and its student body.

A third category of programmes also exists across all universities. This comprises specialised first year entry routes where there is no substantial link to a common entry programme. These programmes typically include areas such as medicine, physiotherapy, architecture, often with their own professional accreditation requirements, as well as specialised

areas of humanities and social sciences. In 2011, an average of 25% of first year undergraduate students entered the university sector through one of these routes.

### The international position

Most Irish universities offer between 40 and 80 entry programmes, for between 2000 and 4500 new undergraduate students per annum per university<sup>3</sup>.

Compared with UK universities, the number of first year entry options in Irish universities appears somewhat modest. For example, the University of Edinburgh offers approximately 500 undergraduate degree options, including single and joint honour programmes (as found in a number of Irish universities) to an intake of less than 5000 new undergraduate students each year. In comparison, TCD (with a programme structure similar to the University of Edinburgh), has approximately 235 first year options, and UCD (with a similar student intake number to Edinburgh) has approximately 60 first year entry options. Similarly, the University of Ulster has 250 undergraduate degree programmes for 4300 new entrants, and the University of Warwick has 118 undergraduate degree programmes for 4400 new entrants.

Compared with a number of continental European benchmarks, Irish universities are placed within the international comparator range, although there is a clear difference in approach between a number of countries. For example, in Denmark, the Universities of Aarhus and Copenhagen offer 98 and 79 undergraduate degree programmes respectively, for approximately 6000 new students each. In the Netherlands, the Universities of Maastricht and Twente offer 19 and 22 undergraduate degree programmes each, for 3300 and 1650 students respectively. The University of Zurich offers 65 undergraduate degree programmes for 3500 new students per annum.

### Options

It can be seen from the comparative data that the overall Irish situation does not seem out of line internationally in terms of course choice and almost half of entrants to universities come through a broad entry route.

However, a number of universities have reviewed their course offerings, especially focusing on programmes with small quotas. As a result, the 2013 CAO Handbook (to be published in autumn 2012) will include a further reduction in the number of specialised entry programmes in some of the above areas.

There is potential to rationalise course offerings in the middle group i.e. those which, while specialised, share significant 1st year time with the common entry course. However, while this has the benefit of simplifying choice for students, it will have the effect of raising average points requirements for

<sup>3</sup> The average position is significantly influenced by the number of Two Subject Moderatorships in TCD. If these are excluded, the average is 58 undergraduate programmes per university.

common entry courses. This will change the nature of the points race rather than ameliorating it. And to the extent that specialisation is still required to meet student demand/skills requirements, competition for scarce places will now take place at the end of first year rather than under the guise of the Leaving Certificate. This is de facto already the case for a number of specialised 2nd year options within the broad programme areas.

It should be noted that a generic approach to first year may not be welcomed by all students, and that more specific degree options have in many cases received strong support from employers and other stakeholders. In certain cases, such a move could also increase the length of the programme from three to four years, and may negatively impact on the student experience and quality of provision due to increased class sizes (in a situation where Irish student/teacher ratios are already well above international norms).

The universities are working with the CAO to ensure that the changes already underway do not result in decreased visibility or attractiveness to students of strategically important areas, through the planning of enhanced information regarding the specialised choices within the broad subject areas available to students who progress to subsequent years of those programmes.

In terms of future direction, the more fundamental issue relates to the “group three” courses which are inherently specialised, with little or no overlap with other courses. It is for these courses that the white heat of the points race is most keenly felt.

## **Note Two: Replacement of the current LC grading system of 14 points with an 8-point system (A1, A2, B, C, D, E, F, NG).**

Further to this action point, the IUA requested the CAO to undertake a small pilot exercise in order to ascertain what the effects of such a new LC grading system might be, from the university admissions perspective. The CAO carried out a rescoring of 2011 LC applicants’ grades using the proposed new non-segregated LC grade bands, assuming that all other parameters remain unchanged.

In particular, this exercise attempted to gauge what the proposed changes might lead to in terms of the need for greater use of additional selection measures<sup>4</sup> to distinguish between applicants on identical points scores.

It should be noted that the changes introduced to the LC grades in 1992 (A1, A2, B1, B2, B3 etc. to replace the broader grade ranges of A, B etc. which existed previously), were in order to introduce greater differentiation into the LC results, and explicitly to reduce the extent of random selection which was then taking place at third-level entry between candidates on identical points scores. This random selection was seen – and continues to be seen – as undesirable by all stakeholders, including the universities. However, it should be noted that random selection continues to feature, albeit on a very much reduced scale, in the current third level entry system where a place needs to be allocated among two or more candidates with identical points scores and where no alternative options can be found.

The results of the CAO pilot exercise showed that the number of courses where students achieved exactly the same points scores, but where there would not be enough places for all these students (i.e. an additional form of selection would then be needed), increased from 64 courses to 401. The numbers of applicants on identical points scores who were likely to be refused places under the current system (without an additional form of selection) increased from 301 to 1,472. The largest number of applicants to any one course on identical points scores who remained unselected increased from 20 to 49 unselected applicants for a single course. There were 8 courses in the test data where 20 or more applicants had achieved the cut-off points but would not have been offered places.

It is therefore clear that the proposed revised LC grading system will result in a significant increase in the number of applicants on identical points scores, and therefore a reduced ability for universities to differentiate between applicants to the same level of accuracy as before. A simple way to manage this would be to rely on random selection, as was done in the past, to fill the last places on a course. However, other options could be explored to further differentiate students on identical points scores.

This issue also needs to be seen in the context of its backwash effect on the actual marking of the exam, since less granularity in assessments can potentially lead to positive developments in assessment.

## **Note Three: Ranking-based scores for points purposes**

This involves changing the way points are allocated for Leaving Certificate grades, to a ranking based score. This would move away from the current system, whereby all higher level A1 grades receive 100 points, and all higher level C1 grades

<sup>4</sup> The consideration of additional selection methods will be facilitated by the forthcoming report from the National Research Group Evaluating the Revised Entry Mechanisms to Medicine (NRGEREM).



receive 60 points to a system where the points would be awarded based on the relative performance of the student against the relevant cohort taking that subject nationally.

If it is accepted that the purpose of points is to ration places based on the student's attainment relative to that of other students seeking the same place, it could be deemed reasonable to base individual subject points on the same criterion. This would involve using LC grades to place the students in merit order for the subject, with the students with the best grades coming first and those getting worst grades coming last. This merit ranking does not imply attainment of any particular grade, or considerations of pass or fail. Those are matters of academic standard, not merit ranking.

The most obvious way to convert merit ranking into points is to use percentiles with those in the top 1% getting 100 points, those in the next 1% getting 99 points, and so on, with those in the bottom 1% getting 1 point. Adjustments might need to be incorporated into this option for Leaving Certificate subjects with low numbers of candidates and therefore different grade distributions.

An advantage of this option is that it is independent of subject workload, marking differences, grade distribution, etc. It could therefore be considered a fairer system of rewarding student effort and performance. It could incentivise students to take what are currently regarded as the "harder" subjects. It also treats every subject in a similar manner and is easy to understand.

While attractive, this approach requires further detailed analysis with regard to its possible impact on subject choice and the potential for 'gaming' of the system.

## Note Four: Supplementary Assessment

This could involve standardised psychometric testing tailored for applicants to a range of different programmes, as is currently the case for medicine and for mature entry arts applicants in NUIG, UCC and UCD, and nationally for all mature applicants to nursing (as well as in a number of postgraduate programmes). Such tests are widely used for recruitment purposes in both the public and private sectors, and indeed in selection for higher education in a number of other OECD countries. The scores for psychometric testing could be added to those obtained through the Leaving Certificate – possibly with some small moderating mechanism, as currently with the HPAT and Leaving Certificate scores – to give an aggregate score for the purposes of determining selection.

## Note Five: Transversal and Foundational skills and the first-year experience as priorities for concerted action across Irish higher education institutions.

### 5A. Transversal and Foundational Skills

There is national and international evidence that the first year of undergraduate studies is the crucial year for students. Students who progress beyond this first year have much greater chances of successfully graduating. As a result, Irish universities have been active over many years in addressing issues aimed at improving student retention (in particular during first year) and successful progression to graduation. The success of these initiatives is visible through the fact that the completion rate of Irish university undergraduates is significantly higher than the OECD average.

The universities have made considerable advances in recent years in the area of reinforced foundational skills, based on their experience of assisting undergraduate students who have demonstrated insufficient preparedness for 3rd level academic and other requirements. Examples include the widespread availability of mathematics support centres, academic English support programmes, study skills support programmes, etc. Universities also provide IT and foreign language skills development support for students. These supports are available throughout the year, as students need them, rather than only during an induction phase at the start of the year.

These provisions, along with many others which are designed to ease the transition of students into higher education, are available to all new students through formal induction/ orientation events, and reinforced through a system of Personal Tutors/Student Advisors/Year Heads who have specific roles, in particular for first year students, in relation to providing advice and information on general student issues, monitoring of academic progress, assisting in academic choices, and general advice regarding potential changes in a student's educational arrangements.

Ensuring that students acquire key generic skills is also addressed in a mainstream way through the design, delivery and assessment of all academic programmes, where broader issues of specific and generic knowledge, skills and competences are incorporated as part of the universities' adoption of the National Framework of Qualifications, and articulated through defined learning outcomes for each programme and module.

Notwithstanding the strong existing focus on assisting first years and ensuring successful progression through undergraduate studies, the internal university groups referred to above are also addressing the issue of strengthening “foundational skills” from the perspectives of, inter alia, the needs of progression routes beyond first year, to assist students in their move from the generic to more specific elements in their programmes and the flexibility to transfer between programmes where required.

Regarding the duration of the academic year, in most universities, registration and orientation for new undergraduate students takes place during the first or second week of September, with teaching beginning the follow week. In a number of cases, these starting dates have already been brought forward in recent years.

If the universities were to consider the option of moving the start of term to an earlier date for first year undergraduates, the LC results would have to be made available earlier during the summer, to allow HEIs time to process these results based on student preferences, to make offers to students, and for students to accept these. This process requires a minimum of two weeks, and the current practice of issuing LC results in mid-August does not allow for an earlier start to the academic year for these students.

#### **5B. Quality of information on the subject content and learning outcomes of their courses, particularly in the context of broader intake to undergraduate programmes**

The universities agree that high quality information is essential for applicants in order to assist them in making the best choices regarding their study options and preferences. Such information can help ensure high levels of first year completion and successful progression to graduation, in an effective and efficient way for the student, the institution and the taxpayer. From analysis undertaken in some universities, there is clear evidence that student withdrawal from programmes is strongly linked to inadequate course information.

Significant work has however been done within universities in recent years to improve the presentation of course and module descriptors, in particular ensuring that they are readable and understandable for prospective students. The use of curriculum management systems allows for real-time publication of this information.

In addition to the above, very considerable amounts of information regarding undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are also available to the general public through the website [www.qualifax.ie](http://www.qualifax.ie). This website has been designed by guidance counsellors, is maintained through the NQAI and each educational provider, and is used to serve as a “one stop

shop” for learners, providing comprehensive information on further and higher education and training courses available in Ireland.

This includes full information for each course including entry requirements, course content and subjects taught, and examples of typical career or other progression opportunities for graduates. The Qualifax website is fully searchable and the information on each course also provides direct links to additional programme information on each HEIs own website. It is important to acknowledge that the applicants/students also have some responsibility here to research what they are applying for and how their proposed study programme will fit into their broader career and life options.

The universities will continue to ensure that the quality of information available through Qualifax and other media is as high as possible, and that the target groups for this information are informed as well as possible. In this respect, the universities would like to emphasise the importance of high quality guidance services for all students who are considering applying to higher education. The universities will continue to support guidance counsellors in their individual and collective work within the second level system, as well as guidance professionals in other sectors of education and training.

## **Appendix - New Models of Assessment - TCD Pilot**

Following on from its international conference, ‘Undergraduate Admissions for the 21st Century’, held on 18 May 2012, Trinity College Dublin is developing a pilot scheme to admit students using an alternative admissions route. A University implementation group is examining how to admit students to a high points course, such as Law, with a view towards trialling this approach for Leaving Certificate 2014. Law is considered a good test case, as it is a high-demand, high-prestige course.

The approach follows the advice of Steven Schwartz, the Vice-Chancellor of Macquarie University and the author of the UK government’s report on ‘Fair Admissions to Higher Education’, who said at the conference: ‘The best approach is not to use a single indicator or score. It is better to use a comprehensive set of predictors in the hope that the weaknesses of one might be compensated by the strengths of another.’

As regards the modalities of this approach the following example is illustrative: For a course having a nominal 100 places, 60 places would be filled in the traditional way, with those with the highest points receiving a first round offer, 20 places would be reserved for non-traditional students reflecting the commitment to access and diversity, and 20

places would be set aside for the pilot. Any applicant student who achieved 400 points or more would be considered for these pilot places.

Students wishing to study Law at Trinity in 2014-2015 would apply using the online CAO form, but would be directed to a separate page in respect of their application for the course. Here they would provide some contextual data, and be required to answer a range of long (500 words) and short (25 words) questions. For example, a long question might be: 'Benjamin Franklin once said, "All mankind is divided into three classes: those that are immovable, those that are movable, and those that move." Which are you?' A short question might be: 'If you could witness one moment in history, what would it be and why?'

The university intends to be explicitly clear that applicants under the pilot will be assessed in a holistic way using a combination of objective and subjective criteria. It intends to publish (and publicise) in advance the criteria which will be used for selection, acknowledging that a number of different modalities are being used (academic results, contextual data, and supplementary information). In the pilot the college aims to measure academic ability, potential, and motivation for course, underpinned by a commitment to diversity.

Some issues to be addressed in respect of the pilot include:

- How to frame questions which could not easily be answered by parents or teachers thus distorting the application. Therefore the methodology for setting and assessing these questions will follow international best practice.
- The possible need to increase the overall quota for the relevant course to avoid inflating its points score.
- The need to fully explain the approach and reassure students, parents, and teachers, of its fairness and transparency.

From a broader national perspective, the principal issues that require serious consideration are:

- implementation within the CAO system,
- resources required for the assessment process, and
- the practicality of scaling the approach generally.